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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PARM](#) [MNUC](#) [PGOV](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: U.S. NUCLEAR PRIMACY ARTICLE HITS A NERVE

Classified By: Ambassador William J. Burns per 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) Summary: A Foreign Affairs article asserting the advent of U.S. nuclear primacy has caused a stir in the Russian political elite and media and forced Russian leaders to defend the viability of Russia's deterrent force. The thesis plays to the belief that the U.S. regards Russia as a potential enemy, not a partner, and that a U.S. BMD capability could serve as a shield enabling an American first strike. We will continue to look for opportunities, including upcoming visits by high-ranking U.S. officials, to take on these misperceptions. End Summary.

Defending Russia's Strategic Nuclear Potential

¶2. (C) The "Rise of U.S. Nuclear Primacy," an article by academics at Notre Dame and the University of Pennsylvania that appears in the current issue of Foreign Affairs, has created a stir in the Russia political elite and media and touched a nerve in the Russian defense establishment. Deputy Foreign Minister Karasin raised the article in a March 28 meeting with Ambassador, as did Kremlin Foreign Policy Advisor Prikhodko on March 30. Ambassador responded that the article reflected the views of its authors, not the U.S. government, and said it badly misrepresented U.S. policy.

¶3. (SBU) Media interest has compelled senior officials to go on record defending the capacity of Russia's nuclear deterrent. Defmin Sergey Ivanov has commented that the article shows that some in the U.S. "must dislike the fact that we have established good relations with China." Underlining that Russia maintains "powerful and effective nuclear forces," Ivanov said the article was "not serious" and compared it to accusations that Russia had provided intelligence to Saddam Hussein.

¶4. (SBU) Colonel General Nikolai Solovstov, Commander of Russia's strategic rocket forces, focused on the article's assertion that BMD technology could give the U.S. a shield for a first strike. He stated in an interview: "We have always managed to find resources for preserving and renewing our strategic nuclear potential. Current technologies make it possible to develop new missiles and other weapons for outsmarting even the most effective ABM system." Vladimir Dvorkin, a former MOD official now at an Academy of Sciences institute, told the press that the Foreign Affairs article "exaggerated" the incapacity of Russia to ensure continuing nuclear deterrence, but confirmed that the general degradation of Russian capabilities described in the article was closer to the mark. Former MOD liaison office head Leonid Ivashov described the article as "a political means of putting pressure on Russia, a warning to Russian politicians."

Dismay

15. (C) Aleksey Arbatov, a former Duma Defense Committee Deputy Chairman, raised the article in a March 28 meeting with us. He acknowledged that the authors were not well-known, but said the article's publication in Foreign Affairs nonetheless gave it the aura of a "semi-official statement." Arbatov, who chairs an advisory group on strategic issues at the Security Council, told us officials there were dismayed. He said some in the Kremlin saw the article as part of a series of salvos aimed at Russia and pointed to "demeaning" references to Russia in the U.S. National Security Strategy, the accusation that Russia passed military information to Saddam, and the lack of U.S. recognition for Russia's prerogatives in its neighborhood.

16. (C) Arbatov added that the idea that the U.S. might seek to use nuclear blackmail against Russia resonates strongly in Moscow, especially in the MOD, and an attempt to intimidate Russia through efforts to develop nuclear primacy would spur Russia to be invest more in its own nuclear arsenal. Arbatov said the Foreign Affairs article would be the prime subject at a Conference at which he will speak at the Carnegie Moscow Center April 4.

17. (SBU) Former Prime Minister Yegor Gaydar also joined the chorus of lamentation in the March 29 Financial Times, noting that the Foreign Affairs article had had "an explosive effect...Even Russian journalists and analysts not inclined to hysteria or anti-Americanism have viewed the article as an expression of the U.S. official stance." Gaydar argued that "if someone had wanted to provoke Russia and China into close cooperation over missile and nuclear technologies, it would have been difficult to find a more skillful and elegant way

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of doing so."

Comment

18. (C) The article's forecast of U.S. nuclear primacy plays to deep-seated Russian fears and undermines efforts to build confidence that our BMD efforts do not come at the expense of Russian security. While official and expert Russians recognize that the article does not formally represent the views of the U.S. government, there is wide suspicion that its appearance in a prestigious journal, especially in the context of other recent strains in our relationship, may nonetheless have had some official sponsorship, or at least accurately reflect influential views within our government. High-ranking U.S. officials who will be visiting Russia in the near future (including STRATCOM's General Cartwright, ISN Assistant Secretary Rademaker, and U/S Burns) should expect questions from Russian interlocutors and the media for clarification of whether the U.S. is seeking, or at least expecting, to be in a position of nuclear primacy vis-a-vis Russia in coming years.

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